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Creative Outlets Empowering At-Risk Youth:
Cultural Expressions through Recording Technology and Multimedia Productions

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Introduction

Have you ever thought about what happens to our youth in high rate crime and homicide neighborhoods? Without growing up in a community like Richmond, California, some may never really know the experience without living in close proximity of the violence. The reason to explore these ongoing issues are to gain knowledge on disenfranchised “at risk” youth in order to assess the factors of being “at risk” and how the right resources are provided to give them the tools, skills, and freedom to be their best selves possible. Through time, hard work, and dedication we see various centers and programs that specifically target these youth who are impacted and provide a multitude of resources. These programs focus on education, career, health, community and proper resources provided to assist participants of the programs. There are a few empowering motivational resource centers that are currently in operation, which have successful creative outlets for youth where “at risk” populations are susceptible of fall victim to gangs, drugs, police brutality/shootings and crime in the Bay Area, where these are ongoing issues. Offering youth ways to express themselves through various platforms of media will help bridge the gap in the community between teens and residents.

Richmond’s History

The history of Richmond, California is rich and full of diverse stories from the earliest settlers of the Ohlone Indians, the Spanish Era, Early Industry (1895-1901), Industrial Growth, World War II and Shipyards (1940-1945), Postwar Adjustment

(1945-1960), and the Richmond developments (1960-1995). Before the Ohlone Indians were pushed to extinction, they were known to have a reliable and tranquil lifestyle. Their culture was based on strong community ties, spiritualism, and rich artistic creativity. Though the Ohlone period may have ended centuries ago there is some of the same significance still here in Richmond based on community ties, cultural expressions through artistic creativity today.

The next imprint on history is the Spanish Era that follows the Ohlone period, which began with some of the first Europeans to travel to the East Bay. The middle school Juan Crespi located in Richmond as a monument of history is named after Spanish explorer Juan Crespi. He traveled on an expedition from Monterey with Lieutenant Pedro Fagas who explored the east side of the San Francisco Bay all the way up to the Sacramento River and back south to San Joaquin. During the Spanish era "Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, [and] large tracts of land in California were granted to military heroes and loyalists" ("History of Richmond"). Furthermore, "in 1823, Don Francisco Castro was given 17,000 acres of land in Contra Costa, which became known as Rancho San Pablo" ("History of Richmond"). Richmond is established on part of the land granted 70 years after the passing of Don Francisco. During this industrial era the Santa Fe Railroad was vital, establishing a western terminal in Point Richmond. In 1901, "the Santa Fe moved its shops to Richmond and Standard Oil built its refinery there" adding more jobs to the newly industrialized city (Henry Cutting). The ensuing periods of industrial growth made way for more residents by 1910 grew to 7,500 as grain fields turned to cities in Rancho San Pablo. The industrial

momentum continued to grow in Richmond which will prove valuable in ensuing years to facilitating the needs of World War II, and the Kaiser shipyards generated many industrial opportunities to import and export commerce.

This industrial growth continued throughout the city in 1905 bringing in more people making a population spike from 2,150 to 23,609 in 1940. Kaiser Richmond Shipyards, which was “one of the biggest shipbuilding operations on the West Coast” was a major employer (“Richmond Shipyards”). These Richmond shipyards created new employment opportunities for minorities, people of color, and for women who joined this massive labor force. This had obtrusive long-term effects on Richmond, impacting the city's population which had a dramatic leap again from 23,600 in 1940 to over 93,700 people in 1943 due to thousands of black and white southerners migrating to work in the shipyards. The downside is many of these new residents would be "housed in temporary structures, dormitories, project houses, and apartments, more than 60,000 people lived in public housing" (“Richmond History”). Many of those project houses have been renovated, however they still remain apart of Richmond's history.

The history of Richmond is very rich, filled with negative and positive points. Even though today it is only seen as one of the most dangerous cities in the U.S., a lot of kids call this place their home and others would call this a historical city. From the old Kaiser shipyards to Chevron oil plants the city has been growing rapidly since 1905 when it was founded. That was until the early 2000's when crime came to an all-time high and the youth became the targets, suffering from poverty gang violence and inequality.

Systematic Disadvantages

Systematic disadvantages are intersecting factors that contributed to the complexity of the systematic faults that hindered Richmond long before today's at-risk youth. One of the more prominent disadvantages became the residential segregation of African Americans, Mexican Americans, Italians, Asians and other immigrant "By 1940, most of Richmond's African American population was concentrated in and around North Richmond," which was the most rural and undeveloped parts of Richmond (Robert Rogers). Like many places in the U.S. during times of racial tensions and discrimination, Richmond also fell victim to racially motivated discourses that put many at a disadvantage to progress in society. The lack of home ownership and job opportunities brought increasing poverty and racial division to those in the community. With these pressures amongst minorities in these communities, many were relegated to criminal activities ignited by social injustices issues. For many, these activities would include participating in the drug trade that "spread around the country, affecting disproportionate numbers of Hispanic and African American communities" (Rogers).

Poverty plays a big part in our community; low poverty areas are mostly made up of African Americans. Low income housing houses substance abusers and jobless people who keep drugs and crime in the neighborhoods when the housing is supposed to provide opportunities for people with jobs, those with children ,and low income families to have a place to live and call home. People also have poor health conditions do to

lack of resources enabling them to work; and welfare dependents count on Food Stamps and cash aid to take care of their households. All of these play parts in the well-being and future of our youth. Most of the youth all go to the same schools in their same neighborhoods and more than seventy-five percent receive free lunch.

Home life for these low poverty youths is troubling; some have nowhere to live and no parents or legal guardians, which leaves a child to take care of themselves. Others have homes and both parents but have no food and witness domestic violence. Those who are affected and try to go to school cannot focus and can't learn to cope while going through trials and tribulations that change everyday. Parents who are substance abusers might as well be absent as well, considering the large scale of how substance abuse can affect individuals.

A Call to Action

Since 2001 the city crime rate has fluctuated due to lack of leads, witnesses and resources. While rates for individual crimes rise and fall, there is not a consistent pattern in either direction. For example, "the rape rate in 2007 was at the lowest point of thirty-one incidents but yet our homicide was at an all time high of forty-seven total occurrences, and it was only seven years later that the rape rate in Richmond reached its highest point of the 2000s at sixty-three"(Richmond Crime Statistics and Crime Data). Looking away from charts, there are stories of different cases that are brought to the public's attention and catch the eye of the media, showing some of the discourses that these poverty stricken communities have to tolerate without equitable resources.

In 2007, Richmond was at an all-time high with a homicide rate of 47 to every hundred thousand people, which is a rate more than eight times the national average. This was a scary time for all young adults in Richmond, especially young black males for whom it was almost impossible to walk safely from your car or bus stop to your house. The community started to fear for all lives that could be in danger, causing the city of Richmond to consider calling in the National Guard. However, those who have been to jail and or in gangs came forward to help those young men and mentor them to lead a better life. The Office of Neighborhood Safety, also known as ONS, was launched in the fall of 2007 following the spike in gun violence in Richmond. This was a program brought about to pay these young men to keep them off the streets and to keep guns out of their hands. The ONS are a team built up of ex-cons. They are not natives to Richmond but have served time in Federal facilities around the surrounding areas of Richmond.

For example, one of the mentors is a man who was convicted of second degree murder and served eighteen years in San Quentin prison. The young men who are targeted to participate in the program are those who are suspected of the worst type of crimes but have yet to be convicted. The mentors help guide these young men to see a better way of life and offer advice for succeeding in the work force. It is an eighteen-month program, and the young men commit to promoting peace and attending anger-management workshops. "Six months into the fellowships the young men can apply for the monthly stipend, which can be as much as one thousand dollars depending on their participation and achievements"(Drash Wayne and Twanda Sambou).

Since the program has started there have been more residents coming forward with information on shootings in the Richmond community. They are making a major impact on the rough inner city. They help the community by not targeting neighborhoods but individuals who have been nearly convicted of dangerous crimes in those neighborhoods. ONS Operation Peacemaker objectives are focused on high crime suspects, they have seen a major drop in 2014 to eleven gun homicides. However in 2015, the gun homicide doubled. DeVone Boggan, the founder of ONS, said that “staffing was cut and less people were touched by the program.” CNN’s *“Paying kids not to kill article”* provides evidence that there is a high need for more programs and outlets for our young men to excel.

Richmond’s Statistics

Richmond's statistics from City-Data.com show the crime rates in the city from 2001 to 2014. These crimes reported consist of murders, rapes, robberies, assaults, burglaries, thefts, auto theft, and arson. Stats show all crimes are down from the years 2001 to 2014 except rapes. The numbers breakdown with murders at 18 in 2001 down to 11 in 2014; however there were surges in murders from 2002 to 2009 tallying numbers as high as 47 murders. Robberies at 410 in '01 reduced down to 378 in '14. Assaults 540 in '01 went down 391 in '14. Burglaries numbered 1,230 in '01 and sank down to 937 in the year 2014. Both thefts and auto thefts were up in 2001 at 3,448 and 1,497 and down by 2014 at 2,114 and 1,230. Arson had a good decline from 95 in 2001

to 27 in 2014. Rapes did not decline, however; in 2001 47 rapes were recorded and as many as 63 were recorded in 2014.

Rape has also played a role in the demographics of Richmond. In 2009 when the homicide number jumped back up to 47, a sixteen-year-old girl was also gang raped and the story received national attention. All of those involved were minorities, including the young woman, and all were residents of Richmond. The young men who were convicted range in age from fifteen to the late 40s. The age group was very wide, but one of these young men would have a story that stood out from the rest. Manuel Ortega who was nineteen the time this horrendous crime took place had dropped out of high school at the age of sixteen and was the oldest of 5 kids. The young man's father had been out of his life a few months prior to the rape. He was using prescription drugs, drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. He had a record that was starting to grow and even attempted suicide prior to the incident. He was screaming out for help but with lack of resources and school guidance, he was convicted and is now serving thirty-two years in prison because he had no outlet and used drugs to cope with the challenges he faced. Young men like him can be saved and lead in a different direction with right opportunities and resources.

Richmond City Issues

There are a number of issues that play a part in the crime rate in Richmond, CA. Community activists, leaders, and organizers work together as one entity to develop solutions come up with ways to prevent or "control" the violence in the community.

Making a difference in every family's life is low income housing and providing low-income-based property for qualifying households. Participants must fall in or under the fiftieth percentile in the pay rate in the community in which they wish to reside. Also, they are only required to pay thirty percent of their gross income for the month. This provides housing that will include a stable place for families to call home where they can feel safe, warm and have a sense of confidence with a home of their own. In order for minority children to have a fighting chance, a parent must be able to provide the basic necessities such as food, shelter, and a chance for a healthy life for a child not to worry where they will sleep or if they will have enough food to eat.

Youthworks is a non-profit organization targeted toward teenagers and young adults providing them with opportunities for employment participants are able to apply for jobs based on their availability and preference of work. They offer many connections to companies that are hiring entry-level positions as well as position that requires experience in that field. These various jobs and positions come as part-time or full-time positions with hourly wages ranging from minimum wage to as much as \$14.50 a hour. Duties vary from each location depending on the sites' needs, but all assignments teach basic job skills such as responsibility and social and economic awareness. During a summer session most earn up to fifteen hundred dollars. It might not seem like much, but in a low income families that would help toward food, bills, toiletries and even school clothes and supplies. Youth in low income neighborhoods in Richmond see poverty, death, and crime most of their young lives causing trauma and are affected and

sometimes don't see a way out. Offering positive opportunities will teach and encourage long term goals to our up-and-coming youth.

Organizations and Centers for At-Risk Youth

The Ryse Center is a place for youth that strives to help our youth of Richmond and our community take back what was once theirs: a city of history and economic development. The Ryse Center opened on October 8, 2008, following the the homicide rate of youth spiking near Richmond High School in 2000. "The Ryse center consists of groups of teens and community members focused on priorities and youth-identified activities for children to engage in with each other in a safe and fun place"(Ryse). The center focuses on providing a safe and empowering place of learning and guidance for youth. Participants are offered educational support such as tutoring, college application support, providing motivation and promise to becoming a college graduate. Other support offered is provided through a health awareness department within Ryse to promote proper nutrition, awareness of the LGBTQ community, housing and short or long term counseling.

After presenting this new center that stood for a change and guidance in the community, the city officials and stockholders took time opening the Ryse Center. After eight long years of preparing, The Ryse Center today is lead by a board of directors that has Richmond's youth future in their best interest at heart. The Board of Directors over a non-profit organization must be reliable volunteers with a special background that has shaped their careers, providing promise to the Ryse center it is in each individual's

belief that contribute to the development and structure of the program. The Ryse Center has five very different individuals on its board, but they all come together with one common goal: to build a equality, and partnered leadership.

To give insight on the community first you need to be a resident and be able to wear the shoes that our youth wear such as being a minority, living in close proximity to low income neighborhoods, and relating to the hardships that they face everyday. Sarita Ahuja, a minority living in the Richmond community, is a board member on the board of directors for The Ryse Center. Ahuja is Vice President of Operations of the Neighborhood Funders Group an organization advocating for low-income based communities in the need of social and economic retribution. She specializes in breaking social boundaries in racially segregated communities and providing a diverse and more equal opportunity for employment and youth development. Ahuja leads community based workshops and youth guidance groups to make sure that those who are impacted the most have an influence and get the chance to take part in the development of a program that is built for them. Her guidance has helped develop multiple projects that provide something that everyone is interested in.

Each board member brings something to help put together a promising program. Even the treasurer, Alvaro Fuentes, shows his commitment to the Ryse Center by participating in different community based programs. Fuentes has the skills of making sure that each of the Ryse Center's goals are being met and excelling at providing the youth with the best resources and tools they will need to succeed. Being a part of a

development so new is an opportunity to ensure the quality of health, awareness and independence goals for young adults.

Angela Clausen is a board member with experience in “Business Management and Health Services with an educational background in Public Service Leadership with a non-profit Emphasis”(Ryse). Clausen sets her life goals high while serving as a leader in a center that is all about taking charge. She specializing in working with youth of many different backgrounds and as a “director of a private non-profit foster care agency for more than eight years fell in love working with children of all ages”(Ryse). Whether it be school, a summer internship or a job, having the right people skills and leadership is what will go a long way. Angela Clausen proves how her experience and contributions can benefit the programs like the Ryse center that offer outlets for at-risk youth.

Growing up in the Bay area makes you aware of different cultures and how diversity can impact the way you see the world. Education is what separates people. In the case of many Richmond students at-risk youth are affected by many social distresses that has disrupted the interest to excel in educational pursuits. Tyler Hester, board member number four, is a long-time resident of the Bay Area. Hester is a supporter of educational rights. Having an educational expert who believes in a fair education and the right to go to college is an asset for Ryse. Hester worked on the Obama education policy from 2008 that fought for several rights to education and more incentives for both teachers and students to work and go to school. What stands out most about Hester was he was apart of Teach for America. s teacher, he knows what it takes for the youth to progress and excel in a good learning environment.

The fifth and last board member of the Ryse Center is LaSaunda Tate who specializes in financial guidance and how to get assistance and stay on your feet once you make it. Previously she was a director of a law and justice program for McCullum youth court. It was designed for first time youth offenders to ensure that they are fully aware of their consequences. Participants in the program attended workshops on how they can ensure that they will not offend again. She is currently working as a financial educator for Bright Beginnings Sparkpoint with west Contra Costa County. This gives her an idea of what families need: how much they need for daily and monthly expenses and how to help the youth of those households. Having opportunities to help jump start or restart someone's life can build up their confidence, future. hat takes money and having a sense of how to manage it and keep it, which in turn will help keep the youth off the street.

As you can see board members are not just people you find on the street or rich and empowered; they are people of many different backgrounds and cultures. The more diverse the the board, the more needs can be met, and the communities are built up of people of all sorts of different backgrounds. Each youth center wants to offer that. Moving forward every program does not offer the same amenities, but all have one goal in common, which is to have a safe and empowering place for the community.

There are multiple community based programs that are playing a big part in improving our neighborhoods and empowering our youth all over the Bay Area. These programs are made to attract youth and engage in activities they are interested in. United Roots in Oakland does just that, offering arts and media programing to spark a

creative insight in the lives of youth. It is proven that music helps coordination and listening skills, boosting confidence and self expression. Choosing another form of learning makes it more real for those who live in low income neighborhoods and know someone who has been shot and killed or who are suffering from poverty.

The youth are affected by the violence that takes place in their neighborhoods, which takes away their innocence and safety and causes them to lose themselves. That is when a program like United Roots gives the generation of today the tools and skills to create media, offering a form of self-expression through a lens. Branding yourself as an artist and developing a clothing line that you could sell online might be something you can start to prepare for. Expressing yourself through music is a perfect outlet for anyone who has something to say or has feelings but does not know how to express them. Singing, rap and spoken word are forms of expression that can be a way to teach you to speak in front of people. Self-expression takes some years to establish and young people who don't know what to do with their emotions can sometimes be misinterpreted.

Arts has a wide variety of opportunities for advancement and self-expression, and United Roots provides that for the gamer who loves the graphics and music. Video games are today have music by some of the biggest artist of today, graphics that look real and lifelike story lines. Focusing on visual art, sound design and creative writing, United Roots offers youth of color and low income access to career building and awareness of how many opportunities are out there for artist. Most youth in low income neighborhoods have to work to help their families make ends meet, and money for extracurricular activities is out of the question for some. However, United Roots is giving

free workshops, training and studio access to those who don't have the money, making a difference in a youth's life who learns to express all their different feelings in a positive way. Being surrounded by others like themselves and having the same common goal whether it's music, politics or video games, participants in the program are free to be themselves and feel confident about the decisions they will make as a young adult.

While free expression through arts is one step closer to solving the problem of violence, there is still a need for young people of color to advance in their personal development. For young black men in particular, the options they are given by society are lower paying jobs or what people like to call the dirty work. United Roots provides a good learning experience for young black men who have not been heading in the right direction. Stereotyping of young black men by their peers and elders hinders their life goals, however United Roots helps them in various ways to take their experiences and turn them into a form of expression to tell their side of the story. Young men of color are built up to be self-sufficient, determined and motivated to be a powerhouse of justice and equality, facing the world with a book or knowledge of what life has taught them.

Technological Innovation Benefits

Recording technology hasn't always been as accessible as it is today. Author David Huber points out that with "the advent of affordable digital audio and analog recording systems, [it is] a foregone conclusion that the vast majority of music and audio recording/production systems are being built and designed for personal use" (Huber, 11). The rise of project studios has brought about monumental changes in the business

of music and professional audio. Roey Izhaki states that "like many other new forms of creative expression that emerged in the twentieth century, [recording and] mixing was dependent on technology"(Izhaki,xiii). What is interesting is how naturally these at-risk youth respond to the technology with systems that include a DAW for recording and MIDI sequencing. For a historically disenfranchised member of society, to have access to tools allows them to empower themselves through cultural expression utilizing recording technology, and multimedia productions. For the participants at the Ryse program and United Roots, it means changing lives and rebuilding a community.

It's clear how these innovations in recording technology in this context are beneficial in a number of ways. As Hull, Hutchinson, and Strasser assert, "the continued popularity of recording popular music has led to an increased interest of young people in careers in the recording and the music business" (Hull,226). At-risk youth are able to assess these opportunities to venture into institutions and universities that provide programs for audio engineering or other programs related to the music business. Even if at-risk youth choose to apply to college for other programs outside recording technology, that outcome can still be marked as a win for programs like Ryse and cities like Richmond, knowing the obstacles they must overcome to get there.

Another benefit which could be somewhat arguable depends on your stance on the musical form rap. Scholars have studied hip-hop and rap as a cultural expression raised from an oppositional cultural (Rose,122-23). The rap art form has created a many voiced disdain toward systematic discourses imposed on urban communities mainly populated by minorities. The sad truth is some of the issues of political, economic, and

social injustices that initiated rappers to make a verbal stance in the early era of rap are some of the same issues still plaguing communities. Consequently the rappers of Richmond speak out as well. In the songs recorded by the participants in the Ryse program many messages can be heard. As a community in the need of repairing connections between distinct communities within the city Richmond itself as well as repairing community relations with law officials. Through the recording technology and the music form which can be seen as a beneficial interaction between at-risk youth and their communities.

Summary

This research has been able to follow a city that reached many accomplishments by leaps and bounds through its industrial production and contributions from Richmond Ca, located in the Bay Area. The city thrived early in those years with plenty of work opportunities that incorporated minorities as well as women into the workforce to fill the void of labor positions. The city struggled post-war, and this lead to employment opportunities declining, racial tensions, and residential segregation amongst African Americans and other minorities. The ensuing years of rising crime rates exposed the social ills that long had needed to be addressed. Multiple programs arose out of the necessity of the city to rebuild from within. Whether the program is structured to assist more directly with trying to negate more shootings in the city or a program such as Ryse or United Roots designed to facilitate a place safe for creative outlets where at-risk

youth are out of danger's way, all have been part of a joint effort that has been restoring the city's beauty and bringing down the crime rate.

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